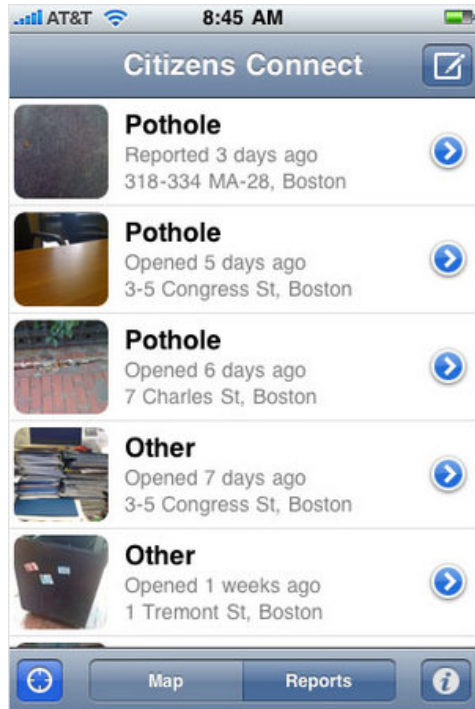


Potholes And Repairs? Boston Has An App For That

by TOVIA SMITH



Enlarge Courtesy of the Boston Mayor's Office

An iPhone screen displays Boston's "Citizens Connect" app. Citizens take photos of potholes and other repairs and the location's coordinates automatically embed in the photo.

automatically embed in the photo. Her complaint goes hurtling through the bureaucracy of City Hall and heads straight out to public works crews around the city.

"My graffiti picture is going to the dude who's going to fix the graffiti!" she says with delight. "Directly to the dude! And that feels good."

After a complaint is made, a red dot marks the problem on a map that can be seen from an iPhone. If Sears keeps checking, she can see the dot turn green when her problem is fixed.

"I'll be watching," Sears says. "It'll be more instant gratification. And I don't have to get irate when I'm finally calling the nice people at the call center."

Yelling At City Hall

Allyn Christopher, an operator at the mayor's 24-hour hot line, says she has had to listen to an assortment of irate callers. One guy was ranting and raving about a paternity test, and she has listened to countless calls about dead animals in the road, and snow-covered streets that need to be plowed.

"People tend to get really whiny," Christopher says. "And naturally it's all the mayor's fault."

But Christopher says that ranting tends to be cathartic, and it's something people need to do. Hot line staffer Frank McDonough agrees that some people just need to "yell at the guy at City Hall."

City officials say that option will still be available to hotheaded callers, even on the iPhone.

"We have the hot button for that," says Nigel Jacob, the mayor's senior adviser on emerging technology. "It's [for when you say] 'My fingers are numb with fury. I can't type. I just need to call.' " The button will automatically connect people to the mayor's hot line.

And if voicing a complaint doesn't satisfy the caller, sarcasm still works, even over the iPhone. The

December 3, 2009

text size **A A A**

A few weeks ago, 41-year-old Bostonian Heather Sears thought the coolest app on her iPhone was SitOrSquat — a listing of the city's cleanest, closest restrooms. But today, she's even more excited about Boston's [Citizens Connect](#) — a new way to use an iPhone to fight city hall.

The new app allows anyone to make a one-touch kvetch about anything from potholes to broken streetlights in Boston.

"I was thrilled to be able to walk down the alley to where I park my car and say, 'All right, there's more graffiti. I want it off now!' " Sears says. "I was like armed and dangerous."

For the 10 years she has lived in Boston's South End, Sears has been a frequent caller to City Hall, complaining about things that needed fixing and making irate calls to follow up when the fix failed to happen.

Snap A Picture

But now, all Sears has to do is snap a picture with her iPhone, and the location's coordinates

first complaint that came through the new system was one about a streetlight not working: The attached photo was solid black.

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How about a "Good Job" application. We are so quick to complain and slow to praise. It would sure be nice to get a thank you "directly to the dude" as well.

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